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**USDA ANNOUNCES SELECTION OF FIRST CSP PARTICIPANTS;
281 contracts selected in Minnesota's Blue Earth River Watershed**

Vernon Center, Minn. August 26, 2004—USDA Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, James Moseley, speaking from the Pahl Farm, Vernon Station, Minn., today echoed Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman in announcing that \$41 million in contracts will be awarded in 22 states who will be the first in the nation to participate in the new Conservation Security Program (CSP).

In Minnesota as well as the Iowa portion of the watershed, one of 22 states to participate in this debut program year, State Conservationist William Hunt of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced that 281 contracts would be awarded in the Blue Earth River Watershed.

Speaking from the Pahl grain farm Hunt said that producers would receive between \$9,946 to \$19,640 for a broad range of conservation work that is protecting and enhancing natural resources including water quality, soil quality and wildlife habitat.

The applicants will be participating on three different tiers reflecting both their documented historical conservation management as well as their agreement to do additional practices to further enhance the environment.

"All successful applicants have achieved high technical standards for protecting soil and water quality," said Hunt. "These are model conservationists who we can point to as our first line of defense in managing ecosystems like the Blue Earth River Watershed with both productivity and careful stewardship as twin goals."

While conservation incentive programs and technical assistance from NRCS date back to the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are being paid for ongoing stewardship.

Work done by the producers in the 18 nationally selected watersheds will significantly benefit both their own watersheds and the people and resources downstream. Collectively, these benefited areas represent some 28 million acres, an area about the size of Maine.

Other states participating in CSP sign ups included Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. The program will be

offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows.

CSP is a voluntary program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of America's natural resources. For more information on CSP and other NRCS programs see <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>.